

To: Appropriations Committee  
Date: March 4, 2011  
Re: Testimony opposing elimination of 22 Department of Children and Families Juvenile Parole Staff

My name is Antonio DePina Jr. I am parent, home owner and life-long resident of the State of Connecticut. I have been employed by the Department of Children and Families for 7 years, the past 2.5 years as a Juvenile Parole Officer/Social Worker. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to partake in this principle process of democracy. My testimony is in opposition of DCF's budget proposal to eliminate 22 Juvenile Parole staff.

In the past few years, we have witnessed a reduction in the amount of court referrals, progress in recidivism, and a decrease in the amount of violent crime amongst our youth. Improvements accomplished by focusing our resources on high-risk youth, along with individualized comprehensive community wrap-around services and support. These positive outcomes are what continue to provide fuel for the Raise the Age legislation, now in its second phase. DCF's budget as proposed will undermine the Raise the Age legislation and quite possibly taint the gains we have made as a state in the Juvenile Justice system.

Research supports that lower youth to staff ratios allow increased individual attention. This enables the worker to build a relationship with the youth and family. As a result, the youth's potential to succeed is maximized. If the DCF proposed budget were to go into effect as proposed, the youth to staff ratio will double prior to the phasing in of the 17 year olds. Thus, Juvenile Parole staff will be hard pressed for time and may be forced to implement cookie cutter approaches that proved to be ineffective in the past.

The harsh reality is that the reduction in staff will cost the tax payers of Connecticut more in the near future. Youth will no longer receive best case practices, or differential responses in care. Juvenile Parole staff will be spread thin throughout the state causing reactionary not preemptive service engagement. Families and Community providers will lack the needed support they have grown accustomed to. Public safety will be compromised as staff will no longer be able to provide the levels of supervision needed to support each youth. The aforementioned will make it difficult to maintain youth in the community. As a result, tax payers will incur more costs, and a greater number of youth will be transitioned into congregate care settings. It is currently estimated to cost \$33 per day for a youth to be maintained in the community. That same youth will cost the tax payers \$350-\$560 per day for residential treatment and \$774 per day if the youth is incarcerated at CJTS.

Other state agencies are preparing to increase staff along with examining approaches to best meet the needs of the incoming Raise the Age population. In contrast, DCF has decided to reduce its Juvenile Parole direct care staff nearly in half. I for one have never been more appalled regarding the bureaucratic inertia we continue to witness.

In closing, I ask that you please examine D.C.F.'s budget and more importantly oppose it. By restoring the 22 Juvenile Parole staff to DCF's budget, you renew your commitment to Raise the Age and continue to promote best practice principles in Connecticut's Juvenile Justice System.

Sincerely,  
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